

Safe Routes to School Possibilities for Maine Schools

Safe Routes to School Programs involve each of the “5 Es” below – Education, Encouragement, Evaluation, Enforcement, and Engineering. Individually and collectively, these strategies can greatly increase the number of students safely walking and biking to school.

A **local Safe Routes team** is a great way to energize and sustain a community's work. This can be organized by any local advocate and should involve the school administration, the parent-teacher organization and/or 2-3 committed parents. It also brings in various stakeholders, including any interested school staff, the district transportation director, local law enforcement, city or town personnel, parents, crossing guards, local bike-pedestrian advocates, etc.

Communities often start by trying just one or more of the following possibilities within the umbrella of the 5 Es:

Education

- **Organize a Pedestrian and Bike Safety Rodeo and/or In-Class Pedestrian & Bike Safety Instruction through the Bicycle Coalition of Maine** – This could be done 1-2 times per year – and the in-class curriculum is specifically geared toward 3rd-8th grade students. Some physical education programs organize the Bicycle Coalition to come in to do this work, other times it is the PTO that has added it as a regular event. Sometime during the school day would be best for the Rodeo – to reach the kids who really need bike safety education, not just the families who might be most motivated to attend. Students can practice their bike driving on a life-like skills course – loaner bikes and helmets can often be made available. [See <http://www.bikemaine.org/what-we-do/bike-ped-safety-education/>]
- **Include Pedestrian and Bike Riding Practice and Education Within the Physical Education Curriculum** – Students can learn and use pedestrian smarts on neighborhood walks and trail hikes. Students can bring bikes and/or bikes are purchased and used by the program – this offers a great way to maintain and build biking skills over the long-term. [See <http://www.bikemaine.org/what-we-do/bike-ped-safety-education/> for *Be a Safe Walker and Be a Safe Bike Driver tip sheets*]
- **Start a Youth Bike Club** – The Bicycle Coalition of Maine works with schools and other agencies to organize free bicycle clubs. The clubs meet weekly for six sessions. They teach students effective and safe bicycling techniques for driving with confidence on public roads and they promote bicycling for fun and good health. [See <http://www.bikemaine.org/what-we-do/bike-ped-safety-education/>]
- **Include Alternate Transportation Education as Part of Place-Based/Expeditionary Learning Curricula** – Alternate transportation – such as walking and biking – can be studied from various perspectives: environmental, health, economic, engineering, social studies, etc. [See curricular units at the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association: <http://www.nesea.org/k-12/curricularunits/>]

Encouragement

- **Organize Walking School Buses and Bike Trains** – Bring walkers and bikers of various ages and skill levels to school under adult supervision. [Contact the Safe Routes to School for nuts and bolts materials to assist with the planning and implementation of Bike Trains. For Walking

School Buses, see

http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/encouragement/walking_school_bus_or_bicycle_train.cfm.]

- **Hold a Multi-Week or Year-Long Contest for Walking and Biking** – The Maine Safe Routes to School Program offers a growing array of fun, useful incentives for one-time to longer-term walkers and bike riders. The community could also solicit donations for larger prizes like bikes, etc. The top participating students/homerooms could win a special prize. Students can have “passports” stamped or Frequent Walker/Rider cards punched.
- **Encourage Walking Field Trips** – These save money and build community connections.
- **Offer Incentives for Walkers and Bike Drivers Who Are Following the Rules and Driving Safely** – Local law enforcement and/or school staff can sometimes offer “tickets” for getting caught doing something good (e.g. a coupon for a fun treat for getting caught wearing a helmet).

Evaluation:

- **Conduct a School Travel Tally and/or Parent Survey** – These can be printed, distributed, gathered and submitted via mail to the National Center for Safe Routes to School – which will scan and return the data to the school in electronic form - and could be a helpful tool for gathering broad input on parents concerns & interests. Surveys can also help with the question of how to best reach out to parents to encourage them to find ways for their kids to walk and bike to school. In addition, there are several fun, effective strategies that have been used elsewhere to boost the return rate of the surveys. [See http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/resources/collateral/Parent_Survey_English_Scan2009.pdf and contact Safe Routes to School for more info]
- **Traffic Calming Assessment** – Arrange a time to have the Safe Routes to School Program, the MaineDOT Bike-Ped Coordinator, and a DOT Engineer come for a site visit to look at possibilities for infrastructure improvements and traffic calming in the area. Visits are generally scheduled 6-8 weeks ahead. The Safe Routes Program would also want to invite someone from the local regional planning organization (if applicable), and local public works, law enforcement, planning, and city officials. [To arrange site visit contact Safe Routes to School – see contact info below]
- **Walkability/Bikeability Audits & Mapping of Safest Routes** – These can be done with students and offer a great mapping and assessment activity. Schools can then decide which routes they would most like students to use and offer a map of suggested routes and even put up signage along the routes (see more below under Engineering). [See http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/resources/education_walkability-checklist.cfm for Walkability and http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/resources/education_bikeability-checklist.cfm for Bikeability Audit Checklists]
- **Evaluate/Update Current School Guidelines & Policies for Walking and Biking to School** – Assess what exists for school guidelines; determine what the school would like to offer in terms of guidelines and safety suggestions for students and their families. [Contact Maine Safe Routes for best practices policies.]
- **Conduct a School Travel Plan** – The best Safe Routes to School walk and bike to school scenarios involve a multi-dimensional approach – looking at everything from law enforcement to

safety education to infrastructure. These strategies help accurately assess how students get to school, what the bike-pedestrian climate is at the school and in the neighborhood, where barriers exist, and help prioritize where to make changes to make it safer for kids to walk & bike to school. Maine Safe Routes can also dedicate staff time to help facilitate the School Travel Plan process. *[Conduct a Student Travel Tally: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/evaluation-student-class-travel-tally>. Start your School Travel Plan here: <http://www.hpcme.org/transportation/schooltravel/>]*

Enforcement

Enforcement, especially for SRTS programs, is a network of community members – including students, parents, adult crossing guards, school personnel, neighborhood watch programs, and law enforcement – working together to promote safe walking, bicycling and driving. This can be accomplished through safety awareness campaigns, education and the use of ticketing for dangerous behaviors.

- **Organize a School Safety Patrol** – Student safety patrols enhance enforcement of drop-off and pick-up procedures at school by increasing safety for students and traffic flow efficiency for parents. Such efforts allow students to participate in promoting traffic safety where they learn skills they can use in their everyday lives. Having a student safety patrol program at a school requires approval by the school and a committed teacher or parent volunteer to coordinate the student trainings and patrols. *[See more info on Houlton example here: http://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DOT_bikeped_news&id=371794&v=full]*
- **Strategize with Current Crossing Guards on Needs/Concerns** – *[Learn more about what has worked elsewhere in this webinar from the National Center for Safe Routes to School: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/srts-webinars/lessons-floridas-crossing-guard-program>]*
- **Work With Local Law Enforcement** – A variety of law enforcement methods can help change unsafe behaviors – of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists – making walking and bicycling safer and more attractive for children and their parents. Examples include: enforcing the child helmet law, “ticketing” students (e.g. with a coupon for a special treat) for “doing good” (e.g. stopping at stop signs, riding with traffic, etc.), using portable speed trailers that visually display automobile drivers’ real-time speeds compared to the speed limit, a traffic complaint hotline to build more connection between community members and police, progressive ticketing (educating, warning, then ticketing) and speed enforcement in the school zone. Communities will need to build in repeat enforcement efforts periodically in order to sustain improvements in drivers’ behaviors. *[See the National SRTS Law Enforcement site for more information and resources: <http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/lawenforcement/>; Also, contact Safe Routes to School about possible funding of law enforcement equipment used primarily to improve safety for students walking and biking to school.]*

Engineering

- **Make Infrastructure Improvements** – This could involve requests of your municipality and/or regional planning organization – and/or applying for Safe Routes to School funding through the MaineDOT. The Traffic Calming Assessment site visit suggested previously would be the jumping-off point to clarify some possibilities. Some might include: sidewalks, bike paths, yield-to-pedestrian/mid-street signs, curb bump-outs, route signage for students and parents, re-routing of car drop-off traffic, on-demand crossing flashers, permanent active speed monitors,

etc. MaineDOT has a 2 year funding cycle – applications are typically due in the spring/summer of even years, awards are announced the next year, with funding then available within a little under 2 years. [If interested, contact Safe Routes to School see <http://www.maine.gov/mdot/community-programs/enhancement-program.php>]

- **Evaluate & Sign one or more “Safer Route Trails” to Your School** – Based on similar projects such as the *Tiger Trail* in Farmington, NH, *Moose Trails* in Sanford, and *Portland Walkways* in Portland – schools can identify which routes they would most like students to use and put up colorful way-finding signage for students. Schools can then use these signed routes as opportunities to encourage students and educate drivers about students walking and biking to school. [Contact Safe Routes to School for more information.]

Safe Routes to School Resources (www.MaineSafeRoutes.org):

- Darcy Whittemore, Central, Western, Northern, and Mid-Coast Regions, *Maine Safe Routes to School Program*; saferoutes@bikemaine.org, 623-4511
- Sarah Cushman, Southern Maine Planner, *Maine Safe Routes to School Program*; sarah@sarahcushman.com; 841-7186
- Jim Fisher, Eastern Maine Region, *Maine Safe Routes to School Program*, jfisher@hpcpcme.org, 667-7131
- Jim Tasse, *Bicycle Coalition of Maine Education Director*; jim@bikemaine.org; 623-4511; www.BikeMaine.org – volunteer coordination and consulting on bike safety education projects.

Community Resource People:

- **Your Local Healthy Maine Partnership (if applicable)** – Healthy Maine Partnerships have Safe Routes to School in their work plan and are eager to assist schools with Safe Routes projects.
- **School Administrators and Walk-Bike Friendly Staff**
- **Your local Regional Planning Organization (if applicable)**
- **Your Local Planning Department & Public Works or Road Commissioner**
- **Local Police Department, School Resource Officers, etc.**
- **Local Bike Shops and other Health/Safety Friendly Businesses**
- **Local Bicycle-Pedestrian Committee**

Other Safe Routes to School Resources:

- ***Safe Routes to School and Liability Webinar*** – “Reducing Liability Concerns and Getting Kids Active through Safe Routes to School” - Sometimes, one of the first challenges communities face when starting Safe Routes to School programs are local concerns about Liability. In this webinar [<http://www.nplanonline.org/childhood-obesity/lets-walk-school-reducing-liabil>] communities learn the basics of liability in the context of SRTS and put liability concerns in perspective, coming to understand how SRTS programs can leave schools with a lower risk of liability than existed prior to the program. The webinar provides practical advice on best practices for implementing SRTS programs and policies and also highlights two new resources from the National Policy and Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity: a fact sheet on liability in SRTS programs and a fact sheet on liability protections for volunteers.
- ***National Center for Safe Routes to School*** – a wealth of information and links for everything regarding Safe Routes to School programs [See: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>]